

1918-19

United States

By the end of World War I, the demographics of the country had begun to change. The United States was more urbanized, and its population older.

The population in the country was 105 million, a gain of 39 percent in 2 decades. The median age was 25.3 (25.8 for men and 24.7 for women), an increase of 2.4 years since 1900. In terms of overall population dynamics, 31.8 percent of Americans were younger

than 15, 89.7 percent were white, and the ratio of men to women was 104.0 men for every 100 women. Average family size was 4.9. (See chart 5.)

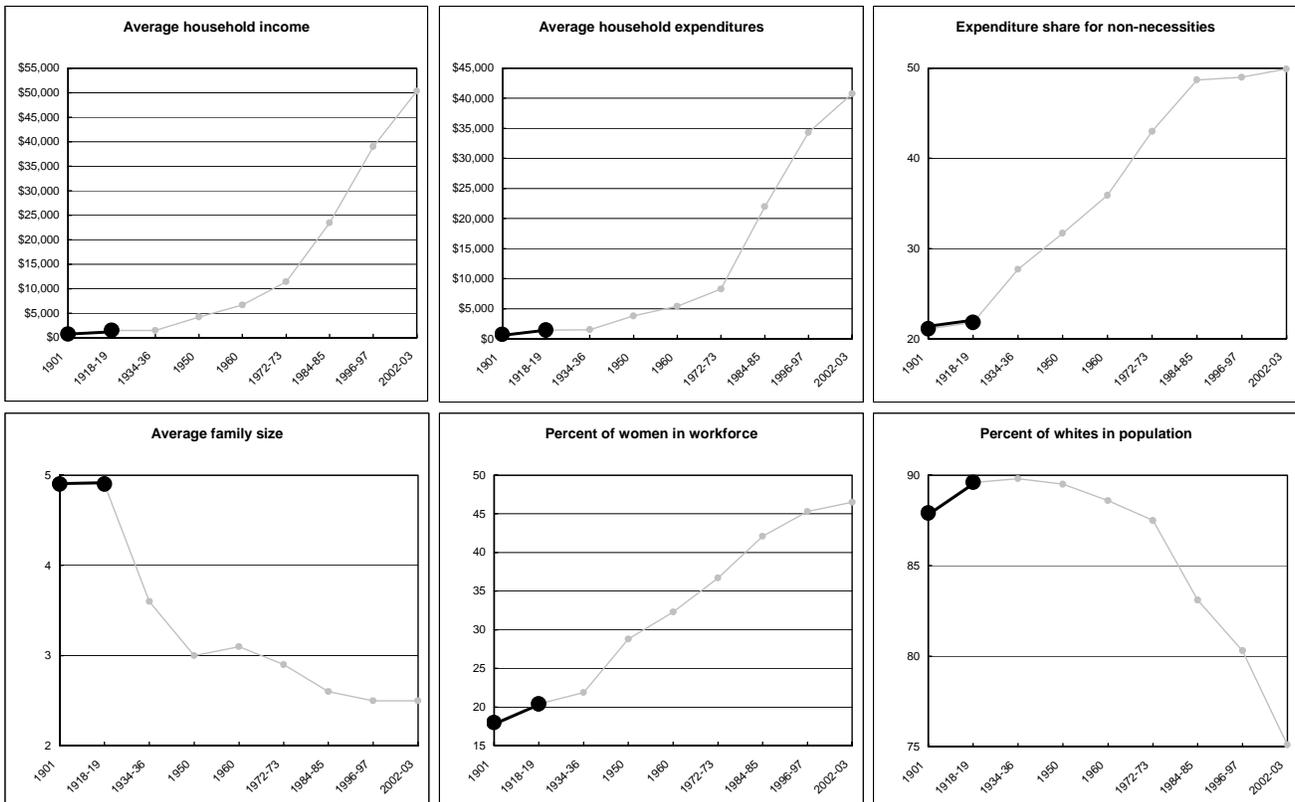
Reflecting the strength of the economy, unemployment nationally was 1.4 percent. Women made up 20.4 percent of the U.S. workforce.

Compared with 1901, average family income had more than doubled, to \$1,518 (a 102-percent increase), while household expenditures had increased to \$1,434 (an 86-percent gain). (See

table 6 for hourly wages in selected industries.) These dollars would have purchased more than \$820 in 1901. Another gauge of the financial health of U.S. families was that, according to the Consumer Expenditure Survey for 1918–19, 70.2 percent recorded a year-end surplus, an excess of income over expenses; 23.7 percent registered a deficit; and 6.1 percent broke even.

In spite of increases in standards of living in the country, the share of household expenditures allocated for

Chart 5. Economic and demographic indicators, United States, 1918–19



SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, and U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*

food, clothing, and housing (78.2 percent) was close to that in 1901. What had changed were allotments within these categories.

The average U.S. household spent 75.4 percent more for food (\$549), but the household's expenditure share for food had decreased to 38.2 percent. Spending for clothing had increased 120.4 percent to \$238, but this category represented only 16.6 percent of total expenditures. Housing was where the significant change took place: spending for housing had increased 86.6 percent, to \$334, although the expenditure share for this category remained 23.3 percent. (The housing expenditure category included costs not only for rent, but also for fuel, light, furniture, and furnishing. The 1918–19 survey for the first time allowed these costs to be itemized.) There were over 10 million owner-occupied housing units in the country.

Retail prices had almost tripled since 1901. A pound of round steak cost an average of 37 cents, and pork chops, which had cost 13 cents a pound in 1901, averaged 39 cents in 1918. Five pounds of flour cost 34 cents, and consumers paid 58 cents for a pound of butter. (See table 7.)

In terms of housing size and rent, the average U.S. home had 5.0 rooms, while the average apartment had 4.5 rooms. Families who lived in their own

homes had a yearly rent (the term used in the Consumer Expenditure Survey) of \$176. Families living in apartments or flats paid a yearly rent of \$178.

New York City

In the postwar period, 9.8 percent of Americans (a slight increase from 1900) or 10.4 million people resided in New York State. Of these, 5.6 million people or 54.4 percent (a notable increase) lived in New York City.

Demographically, 49.7 percent of the city's population was male; 95.2 percent was white; 27.2 percent was age 15 or younger; and 40.4 percent of the population was foreign born—with 24.1 percent coming from Russia, 19.6 percent from Italy, and 10.2 percent from Ireland. One-fifth (20.3 percent) of residents 21 and older were naturalized citizens, and the illiterate accounted for 7.5 percent of the population. There were 525,000 households occupying more than 75,000 homes and apartment buildings. The average family size, 4.9, matched that for the country.

In terms of education, 94.0 percent of New York City children aged 7 to 13 went to school. That percentage fell with age: 78.7 of those aged 14 to 15, 28.5 percent of those aged 16 to 17, and 9.8 percent of those aged 18 to 20 also received an education.

Working people in New York City (72.7 percent of whom were men and 27.3 percent of whom were women) numbered 2.5 million. (See chart 6.) They were employed in various jobs: 37.6 percent in manufacturing and mechanical industries, 15.9 percent in clerical occupations, 15.5 percent in trade, 12.1 percent in domestic and personal service, 9.5 percent in transportation, 6.6 percent in the professions, 2.4 percent in public service, and less than 1 percent in agriculture.

As the city grew in population and its demography changed, family spending patterns also changed. Average family income was \$1,556, an amount 2.5 percent higher than the national average, while household expenditures averaged \$1,526, 6.4 percent higher than for the country as a whole. When compared with 1901 levels, household expenditures had increased 87.5 percent; they would have purchased over \$900 in goods and services in 1901 dollars. According to the Consumer Expenditure Survey for 1918–19, 60.8 percent of New York City families reported a year-end surplus, 23.9 percent a deficit, and 15.3 percent broke even.

The share that New York City families allocated for food, clothing, and housing also had increased, to 80.2 percent, countering the national trend. Allotments for food (42.0 percent) and

Table 6. Hourly wages for selected industries, United States, 1918

Year	Manu- facturing	Mining	Con- struction	Transpor- tation	Communi- cations and public utilities	Trade	Finance, insurance, and real estate	Services	Govern- ment
1901	\$ 0.23	\$ 0.26	\$ 0.28	\$ 0.24	\$ 0.24	\$ 0.25	\$ 0.50	\$ 0.17	\$ 0.28
191853	.67	.57	.61	.42	.45	.69	.31	.49

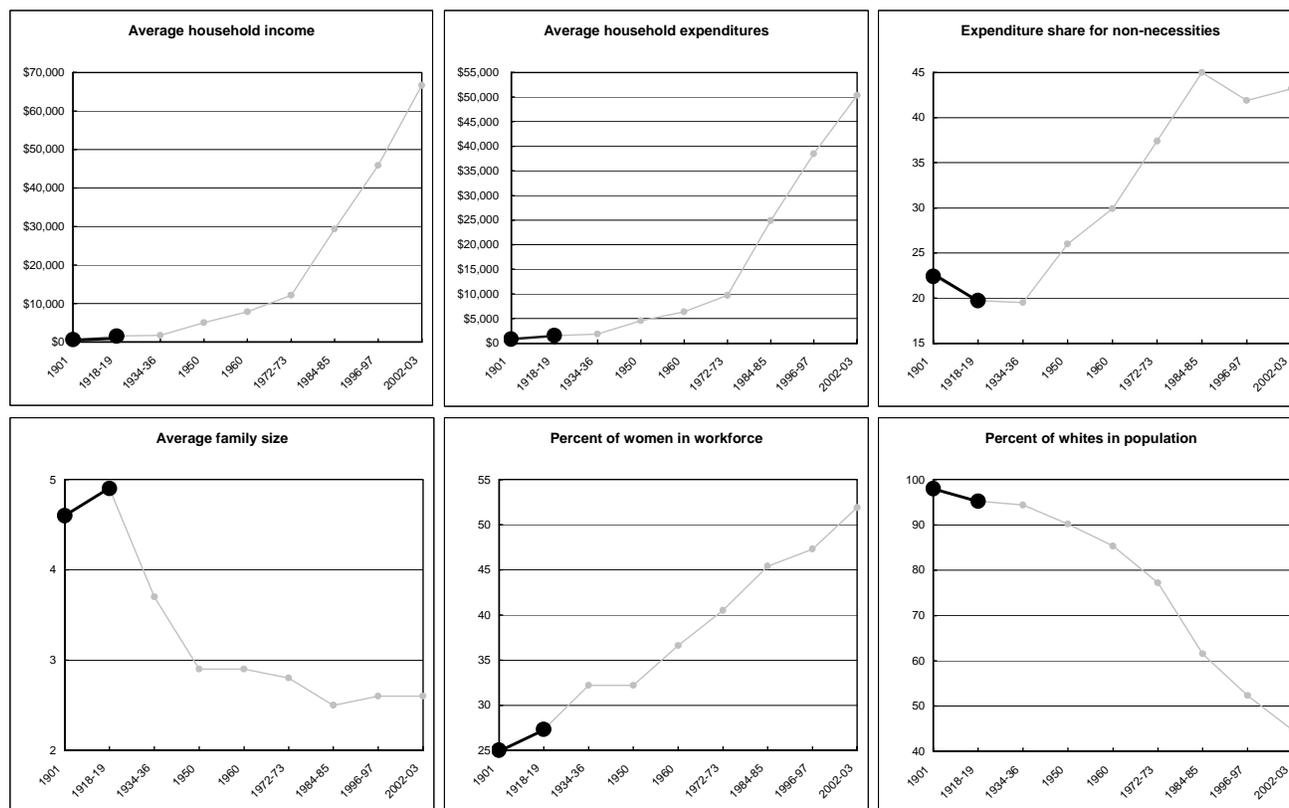
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

Table 7. Retail prices of selected foods in U.S. cities, 1918

Year	Flour 5 lb.	Round steak lb.	Pork chops lb.	Bacon lb.	Butter lb.	Eggs dozen	Milk 1/2 gallon
1901	\$ 0.13	\$ 0.14	\$ 0.13	\$ 0.16	\$ 0.27	\$ 0.22	\$ 0.14
191834	.37	.39	.53	.58	.57	.28

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

Chart 6. Economic and demographic indicators, New York City, 1918–19



SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, and U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*

for housing (21.6 percent) were close to 1901 levels. The noteworthy increase had taken place in spending on clothing, for which the share had increased to 16.6 percent.

In terms of housing, the average-sized home in New York City had 6.5 rooms, while the average-sized apartment had 4.5 rooms. New Yorkers—that is, residents of New York City—who lived in houses paid a yearly rent of \$332; those living in apartments or flats paid \$204.

Boston

At this time, 3.9 million people or 3.6 percent of Americans (a slight decrease from 1900) lived in Massachusetts. Boston's population had grown to 748,000 residents or 19.4 percent of the Commonwealth's population (also a slight decrease).

Demographically, 49.3 percent of

the city's population was male; 97.6 percent was white; 27.9 percent was aged 15 or younger; and 31.9 percent was foreign born. Of those born in other countries, 23.9 percent came from Ireland, 16.9 percent from Canada, 16.0 percent from Italy, and 15.9 percent from Russia. Slightly more than a fifth (21.4 percent) of residents 21 and older were naturalized citizens, and 4.0 percent of the total population was illiterate. The city contained 165,000 individual households, located in 80,000 individual homes and many apartment buildings. Average family size in Boston, 5.3, exceeded that for the country as a whole and that for New York City.

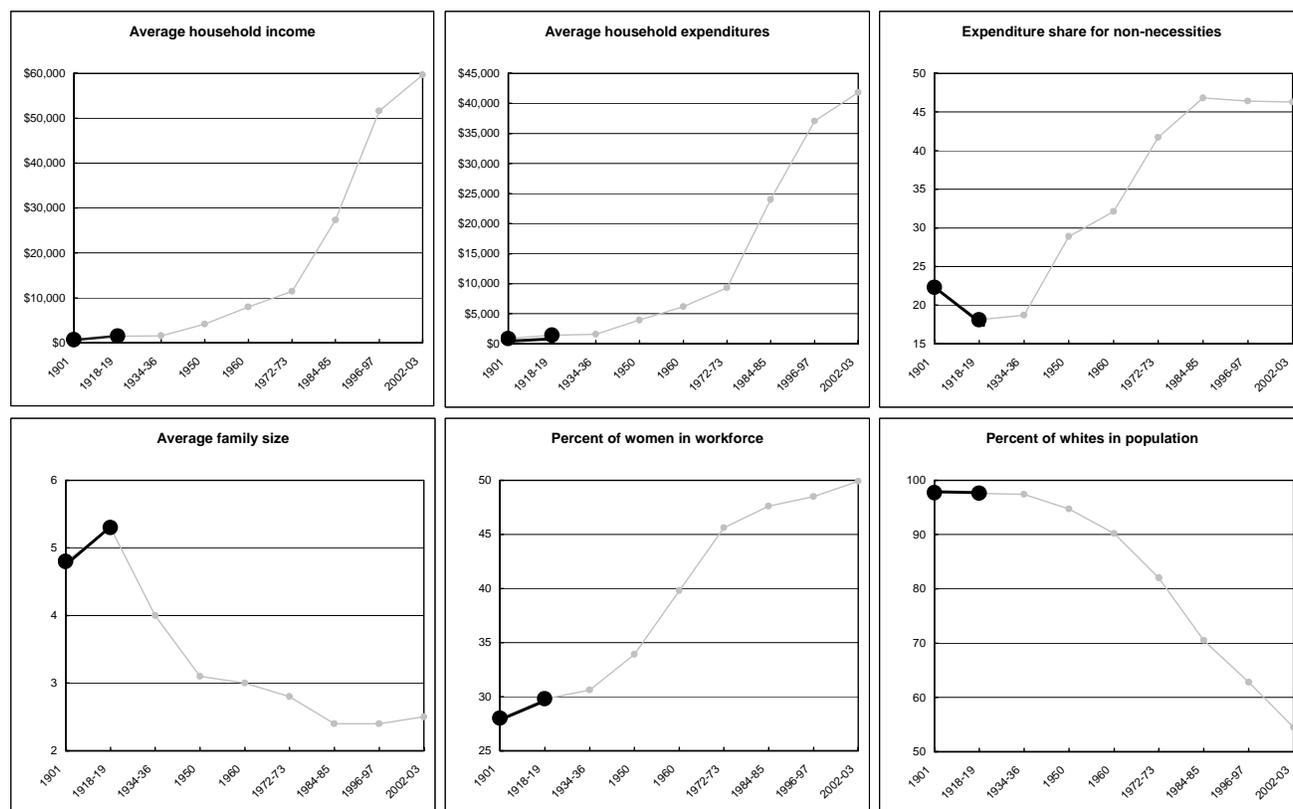
In terms of education, 94.7 percent of Boston children aged 7 to 13 were in school. Among older children, 83.4 percent of those aged 14 to 15, 43.2 percent of those aged 16 to 17, and 15.2 percent of those aged 18 to 20 also received education.

Boston's workforce included 350,000 people, 70.2 percent of whom were men, and 29.8 percent of whom were women. (See chart 7.) These workers were found in the following occupations: 37.0 percent in manufacturing and mechanical industries, 15.1 percent in trade, 14.4 percent in clerical occupations, 13.2 percent in domestic and personal services, 10.0 percent in transportation, 6.6 percent in the professions, 3.2 percent in public service, and less than 1 percent in agriculture.

Total average family income was \$1,477, an amount below the national average and that recorded for New York City. Average household expenditures, \$1,434, equaled those for the country as a whole, but were 6.5 percent below New York City's.

When compared with 1901 levels, household expenditures in Boston had increased 62.8 percent. However, the purchasing power of these 1919 dol-

Chart 7. Economic and demographic indicators, Boston, 1918–19



SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, and U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*

lars was approximately equal to the purchasing power of 1901 dollars.

The share of household expenditures that Boston families allocated for food, clothing, and housing, 81.9 percent, had increased from 1901. This increase was powered by two of the categories: Food, 44.7 percent, and clothing,

15.5 percent. (See table 8 and chart 8.)

In terms of housing, the average-sized home in Boston had 6.2 rooms, while the average-sized apartment had 4.7 rooms. Bostonians who lived in houses paid a yearly rent of \$182, whereas those living in apartments or flats paid \$180.

Perspective

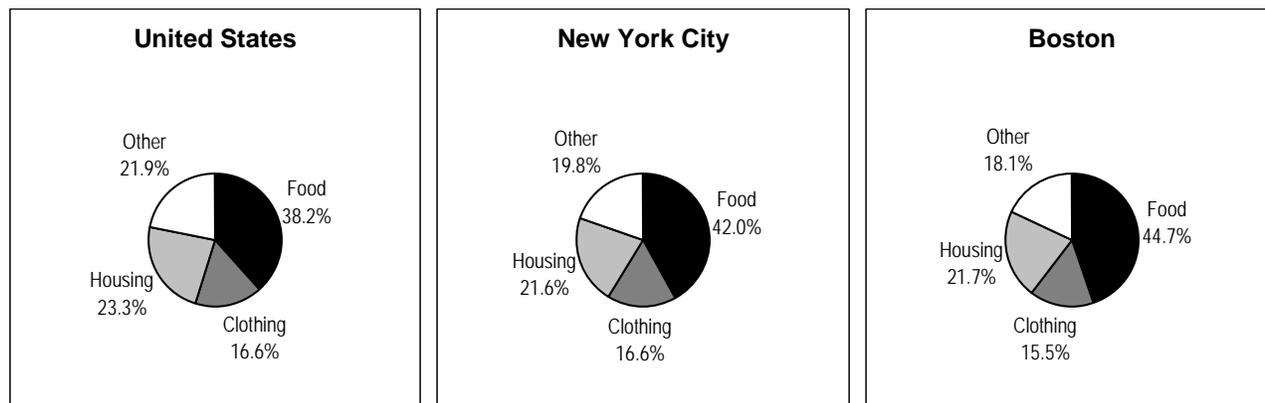
At the close of World War I, both New York City and Boston remained attractive regions for immigration. More than 40 percent of New York City residents and about one-third of Bostonians were foreign born.

Table 8. Expenditures and expenditure shares, United States, New York City, and Boston, 1918-19

Item	United States		New York City		Boston	
	Expenditures	Shares	Expenditures	Shares	Expenditures	Shares
Food	\$ 549	38.2	\$ 641	42.0	\$ 641	44.7
Apparel and services	238	16.6	254	16.6	222	15.5
Housing	334	23.3	330	21.6	311	21.7
Rent	187	13.0	214	14.1	184	12.8
Fuel and light	74	5.2	64	4.2	80	5.6
Furniture and furnishing	73	5.1	51	3.3	47	3.3
Miscellaneous	306	21.3	285	18.7	263	18.3
Average income per family	1,518		1,556		1,477	
Expenditures, all items	1,434		1,526		1,434	

NOTE: Itemized expenditures are not all-inclusive and may differ from total expenditures. Expenditure shares do not add to 100 due to rounding.
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

Chart 8. Expenditure shares, United States, New York City, and Boston, 1918-19



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

Moreover, the United States had become an international center of industrial and financial power. The country's unemployment rate was at a scant 1.4 percent. However, retail prices had begun to rise sharply, increasing 18 percent in 1918 and 14.6 percent in 1919. Family incomes also were increasing, having doubled to \$1,518 since 1901.

Despite these rising incomes, household expenditures for necessities in both New York City and Boston accounted for a larger share of total ex-

penditures than in 1901. This gain was consistent with an aging population, large family size, increased home ownership—27 percent of Americans owned their own home—and sizeable gains in retail food prices.

The spending share for food in New York City had decreased slightly from 1901, while it had increased in Boston. In both cities, families allocated greater shares of household spending for food than did families nationwide. However, the expenditure share for housing in both cities was below that for the coun-

try as a whole. In absolute terms, rental costs for New York City homes and apartments exceeded those in Boston and nationwide.

In contrast to 1901, family incomes exceeded expenditures in both New York City (by 2 percent) and Boston (by 3 percent). These surpluses enabled Boston families to allocate a greater share of their spending for non-necessities, while the shares in New York City and for the country as a whole remained unchanged. ■